

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 000642

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio cited several Arab media as saying that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice might visit the

SIPDIS
Middle East -- Egypt and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Leading media reported (banner in Maariv) that President Bush stressed during his meeting with FM Tzipi Livni last week that the U.S. is totally committed to creating an international rampart against Hamas. Ha'aretz and other media quoted Secretary Rice as saying Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation" that talks with Russian leaders had yielded a pledge from them to demand, during a proposed meeting with Hamas, that the movement recognize Israel and disarm its militia. Major media quoted Acting PM Ehud Olmert as saying Sunday during the weekly cabinet meeting that the moment the new Palestinian parliament is sworn in, the PA will turn into a Hamas entity, and then the rules of the game will change. Maariv reported that Olmert's diplomatic advisers Dov Weisglass and Shalom Turgeman told EU policy chief Javier Solana last week that Israel is prepared to grant Hamas a "grace period" until it becomes clear whether the group will abide by the demands of the international community, and to continue Israel's usual pattern of relations with the PA. The Jerusalem Post reported that last week, FM Tzipi Livni rebuffed Qatari efforts to mediate with Hamas, saying that Israel will have nothing to do with the organization until it changes its ways. The Jerusalem Post wrote that the Qatari overture came Thursday evening, when Livni was in the U.S. The newspaper said that the Qatari officials who contacted her discussed brokering a long-term "hudna" (truce) with Israel.

On Sunday, Yediot and Maariv highlighted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's statement at the meeting of NATO defense ministers in Sicily on Saturday that Russia is fracturing international unity against a terrorist organization that killed hundreds of Israelis and injured thousands of others. Maariv reported that Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov told Mofaz that it's a fact that Hamas has won power and that the world will eventually talk with it.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted Secretary Rice as saying at a closed meeting of Quartet representatives in London on January 30 that the U.S. is not prepared to meet with Hamas, but that it recognizes that there will be countries willing to do so. Ha'aretz wrote that the gap between the U.S. and the other Quartet members, both over Israeli policy in the territories and Hamas, was underscored by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who attended the meeting as a senior monitor of the PA elections. Carter criticized Israel, saying its policy had grown more oppressive in recent years and that the

Quartet had restrained its reactions since the U.S. is not pressuring Israel. The newspaper cited Rice's reply that it is necessary to work in the upcoming period to stabilize the government of Mahmoud Abbas, prevent Iranian involvement, and avoid bolstering the wrong elements in the Israeli elections.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that Israel has decided to "lower its profile" in response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's invitation to Hamas to hold talks in Moscow. The newspaper quoted a GOI source in Jerusalem as saying that Israel preferred to lean on the U.S. administration, which has demanded that Russia keep to the decision of the Quartet. The Jerusalem Post and other major media reported that GOI officials are circulating a document showing Hamas's links to Chechen terrorists in an attempt to influence Russian public opinion against Putin's overtures to Hamas.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told the newspaper on Friday that talks between the PA and NATO will not be renewed if Hamas forms the new PA government.

During the weekend, the media reported on the worsening of PM Sharon's health. Sharon underwent a three-hour operation to remove a third of his large intestine on Saturday.

Ha'aretz reported that Haroun Yashayaei, the head of Iran's Jewish community, has written a letter of complaint to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about the leader's insistence that the Holocaust never happened.

Leading media reported that on Sunday, unknown individuals who were thought to be settlers ignited a series of violent incidents in the Qalqilya region by scrawling graffiti reading: "Mohammed is swine" on a mosque.

Speaking on Channel 2-TV Saturday, Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz said that he planned to meet with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas in order to check whether Abbas intends to prevent the creation of a Palestinian government that would proclaim a violation of accords with Israel.

During the weekend, Yediot and Hatzofe cited the British newspaper The Sunday Telegraph as saying that the U.S. is secretly preparing a contingency plan to attack Iranian nuclear installations with long-range Cruise missiles as a measure of last resort.

Major media reported that during the weekend, FM Tzipi Livni reprimanded Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon for not inviting Foreign Ministry DG Ron Prosor and the head of the ministry's diplomatic bureau, Yeki Dayan, to a dinner he gave in her honor in Washington. Leading media reported that Ayalon was apparently "retaliating" for Prosor and Dayan's attempts to oust him following his dispute with former FM Silvan Shalom.

Yediot (on Sunday) and Ha'aretz reported that Israel Consul-General in Los Angeles Ehud Danoch and other Israelis and Jews have lobbied organizers of next month's Academy Awards not to present "Paradise Now," a film about Palestinian suicide bombers, nominated for best foreign film, as coming from "Palestine." The Jerusalem Post reported that an anonymous online petition to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences calls upon the Academy to withdraw the movie from the list of nominations for best foreign film.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Putin's invitation should also be viewed according to its results."

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The Russians have invited them [Hamas], the French have supported that invitation, and the Americans have not raised an outcry over the entire affair."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Throwing matches willfully into the Mideast's tinderbox, Putin's Russia presents itself as the unscrupulous spin-off of its Soviet antecedent."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker opined in Yediot

Aharonot: "Israel [might] quickly complete the construction of the wall around its borders, and the Palestinians [would] be left with the carnivorous leopard in their own home."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "Hamass's victory must not serve as a pretext for the Israeli government to stop the political process and disengage from dialogue with the Palestinians."

Gadi Baltiansky, Director General of the Geneva Initiative, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "[A] commission of inquiry should not only investigate the government. The 'peace camp' should also give an account."

Block Quotes:

I. "It's What You Talk About That Matters"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (February 12): "In accepting the international position, Israel showed that it is prepared to overlook Hamas' past crimes, if it behaves differently in the future, as it did with the PLO. Putin's invitation should also be viewed according to its results. If the Russians behave as promised, in accordance with the Quartet's announcement, and influence Hamas to change, as Egypt did, then the Russian move should be favored. But if the trip to Moscow ends in a propaganda achievement for Hamas, without a change in its positions, it will only harm efforts to promote calm and a negotiated agreement."

II. "Dangerous Trap"

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 12): "Last week we saw how the entire world capitulated in the face of Muslim rage.... By the same token and in tandem, we have witnessed the first signs of erosion in the firm international stance against Hamas and the promise that no talks would be held with it before it abandoned its tenets. The problem is that Muslims are far less prepared to back away and to fold up their banners quickly than those opposite them, and they have already begun to achieve their goals before even having budged a millimeter: the Russians have invited them [Hamas], the French have supported that invitation, and the Americans have not raised an outcry over the entire affair. It seems that the next step is as clear as writing on the wall: Hamas will say something out of the corner of its mouth, a vague and deliberately misleading mumble that will allow the world to forge ties with it, accept it as a partner in dialogue and urge Israel to sit down with it in negotiation. It will say, perhaps, that it recognizes Israel as a fact. Not its right to exist, heaven forbid, but the fact that it does exist, and for that will win furious applause and warm words of praise and, most important of all -- legitimacy. It is also liable to offer Israel an extended 'hudna' [truce] for a generation.... That is the dangerous trap that is waiting for us right around the corner, and that is the direction things appear to be moving in."

III. "Marginalize Putin"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 13): "Throwing matches willfully into the Mideast's tinderbox, Putin's Russia presents itself as the unscrupulous spin-off of its Soviet antecedent. It seems as bent on spreading its influence in the Arab world as was the defunct USSR and, appallingly, with some of the same disregard for Israel's most basic existential concerns. Israel has been loath to admit this. It has wanted to treat post-communist Moscow as a newfound friend.... The Security Council is supposed to provide the means for collective self-defense in the face of international aggressors like Iran. The Quartet is supposed to provide a responsible international framework to encourage a cessation of Palestinian terrorism and a return to the peace table. Putin's Russia is becoming an ever-greater obstacle to both those goals. Far from carving out a new diplomatic role for itself, it must be marginalized as long as it pursues reckless and dangerous policies."

IV. "Hamass's Narrative and the Taming of the Shrew"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker opined in Yediot Aharonot (February 12): "What should be done with the leopard in our backyard? It should be expelled. To

wit, Israel should adopt an active foreign and security policy that will result in renewed Palestinian parliamentary elections in another number of months. As those elections approach, Israel will have to make a number of difficult decisions, such as about future disengagements, releasing Fatah prisoners, first and foremost Marwan Barghouti, and even a withdrawal to the September 2000 lines. Peoples sometimes make awful mistakes, but democracies -- where they exist -- give them an effective tool to fix them. If Israel remains adamant in its absolute refusal to form ties with a Hamas-led government and, in tandem, promises to end the occupation with a peace-oriented Palestinian government, the Palestinian public is liable to recognize the magnitude of its mistake and mend its voting ways. And if they don't? Israel will quickly complete the construction of the wall around its borders, and the Palestinians will be left with the carnivorous leopard in their own home."

IV. "Don't Boycott the Palestinians"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (February 13): "Hamas's victory must not serve as a pretext for the Israeli government to stop the political process and disengage from dialogue with the Palestinians.... Though the numerous interviews and political statements that Hamas leaders have given in Cairo, Gaza and Damascus have sometimes been confused and full of contradictions, they nevertheless allow one to clearly discern what is happening to the movement.... [Mahmoud Abbas] is a chairman with real powers, he has support in the region and worldwide, and he is seeking a way to work with both the new Palestinian government and the government of Israel. The latter must not boycott the Palestinians because of Hamas."

VI. "Commission of Inquiry Now"

Gadi Baltiansky, Director General of the Geneva Initiative, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 13): "It is ... permissible to demand a commission of inquiry that will investigate Israel's part in creating the reality that we are facing in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel had a share in establishing and strengthening Hamas back in the days when people here thought about creating an alternative to the PLO.... The commission of inquiry should not only investigate the government. The 'peace camp' should also give an account. Did the various parties and organizations, headed by the Labor Party, really promote an agenda of negotiations with the pragmatic elements in the Palestinian Authority, or did they easily yield to the narrative of 'there is no partner'.... The Palestinian people and its leaders are obligated to make an in-house investigation. The great majority supports a peace agreement. The outcome of the elections does not conform to these opinions, and therefore a real inquiry into their errors is necessary and essential. But this does not relieve us of a self-critique. Someone here has erred, someone here has deceived us and someone here should draw the conclusions."

JONES